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ADDRESS

TO

1527
THE PUBLIC,

RESPECTING

THE SITUATION OF

THE

POOR OF EDINBURGH,

DURING THE SEASON

OF

CHILDBEARING AND LYING-IN.

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THE state of the industrious Poor in this City having lately become the subject of much attention, no apology can be required for offering a few remarks on the situation of poor Women during Child-bearing and Lying-in.

Those benevolent individuals who have taken the trouble of visiting the habitations and enquiring minutely into the circumstances of the lower ranks of society in Edinburgh, have found, that the working poor who live in the married state, in general reside in habitations consisting of a single apartment, ill ventilated and miserably furnished; that where there are children, the united industry of the husband and wife is absolutely necessary to the maintenance of the family; and that either the price of labour, or the expence or mode of living, is such, that no savings are made, and hence no provision is laid up for the day of sickness.

Childbearing and Lying-in must to women of this description be productive of much distress and not a little hazard. Unable to give an adequate compensation for trouble, they cannot command that assistance which is sometimes essential to a safe delivery: }

And after they have escaped the perils of childbearing, aggravated by unskilful management, they have many sufferings to undergo. The nature of their dwellings deprives them of the comforts of pure air, cleanliness, and rest of body and mind ; and the diminution of the funds of the family prevents their having the articles of diet useful or even necessary to recovery while lying in, and, at the same time, subjects them to the alternative of having their infant neglected, or of making exertions in its favour that may injure health or endanger existence.

It cannot appear surprising, that from these circumstances there is a great mortality of children within the month after birth, and that annually some lying-in women are lost to society, and many rendered helpless and diseased for life.

A simple recital of these evils must be quite sufficient to excite a desire to remedy them. Every principle of humanity and of morality concurs in establishing the propriety of the measure.

Two methods may be proposed for this purpose, viz. the institution of a society for affording professional and pecuniary assistance to lying-in women at their own habitations ; or the erection of an Hospital, to which poor women may resort during childbearing and lying-in.

The former of these plans might be productive of much good at a very trifling expence. The wives of many of the tradesmen and mechanics cannot be absent from

from their own families even during lying-in, altho^d they may stand in great need of the attentions of a regular practitioner, and of a little pecuniary aid. The small sum of five shillings would in ordinary times be sufficient to defray the extra expences of lying-in, if professional assistance were given gratis. Four hundred poor women might thus be annually relieved from sickness and poverty at the trifling expence of an hundred pounds. And it might be reasonably expected that a very considerable proportion of the helpless innocents who are every year lost through ignorance and neglect might thus be preserved.

But in many instances it would be impracticable to alleviate the distress of a poor lying-in woman by any assistance at her own house. During the day she must be exposed to the foul air, noise, and bustle of a number of children confined within a single apartment; and during the night she must be disturbed by all the individuals of the family crowding into the bed which ought to be appropriated to her sole use.

For women in such a situation the latter plan holds out the only chance of affording relief, that is, the erection of an Hospital, to which they might resort when near the time of delivery. Accordingly, in other countries Lying-in Hospitals have been found of such utility, that all over the continent there is an Hospital of that kind in every city.

Against the erection of such an Hospital in Edinburgh an objection may be urged, That it might
burden

burden the poor's funds of the City or West kirk, by the admission of women from distant parishes.

This objection may be easily removed. If it be not the established law in this country, that a child has a claim upon the parish to which its parents belong, rather than upon that in which it may have been born, there could be no difficulty in having the act of the 13th year of his present Majesty, which makes this provision for children born in lying-in hospitals in England, extended also to the same hospitals in Scotland.

If in alleviating the sufferings of the sick poor, their distress can be made subservient to the promotion of public instruction, without wounding the feelings or impairing the morals of the patient, the benevolence of those who contribute to the erection of Hospitals for the sick is rewarded even in this world. Accordingly, Medicine and Surgery have been greatly improved since the institution of Hospitals: and it is only since the establishment of Lying-in Hospitals that the art of Midwifery has been taught. The admission of students, indeed, to witness the delivery of a woman, might be represented as equally indecent and cruel. But were it not improper to enter into minute details in this address, it might easily be shewn, that regulations may be adopted, by which the delivery of women in Hospitals may be made useful in illustrating practical precepts, without the hazard of offending the most scrupulous delicacy.

delicacy. The strongest evidence of this being practicable, is the encreasing resort of patients to Lying-in Hospitals, wherever these are established. Thus the first hospital of that kind which was erected in London, was opened less than fifty years ago, and now there are at least twelve such institutions in that city.

While, therefore, there can be no valid objection against the establishment of a Lying-in Hospital in Edinburgh, the circumstance of there being a Professorship of Midwifery in the University, may appear to many to afford, in favour of the measure, a strong argument in addition to the motives which have led to similar institutions in other places.

But in judging of the expediency of any plan for improving the condition of the lower ranks, prudence suggests that speculation should be disregarded where the result of experience can be had recourse to. In the present instance, it is presumed that the necessity and utility of a Lying-in charity in Edinburgh can be fully demonstrated by experience.

From a very early period after the erection of the Royal Infirmary, a ward was set apart for the reception of poor pregnant women, and was continued till the year 1793. At that time, by the exertions of the Professor of Midwifery, sanctioned by the Senatus Academicus of the University, and by the Lord Provost, Magistrates, and Town Council, a Lying-in Hospital was opened, upon a plan, which, to the con-

tributors, appeared to combine the two great objects, of an extensive public charity, and of a school of instruction.

The building appropriated to this purpose is excellently adapted to the design. It contains every possible accommodation, and is situated in an open area, commanding the most unlimited ventilation. And while every suitable convenience was provided for the comfort of patients within the Hospital, proper means were adopted for extending the benefits of the charity to poor women at their own houses.

With the view of rendering the Hospital as much subservient to public instruction as should be consistent with the welfare of the patients, it was agreed that the male pupils of the Professor of Midwifery, on paying a certain sum towards the funds of the Hospital, and the female pupils without any such fee, should be allowed to attend the patients, under the superintendence of the physicians.

The effect of these benevolent designs has exceeded very much what might have been expected from the means in the power of the contributors.

The annual receipts from the 1st of November 1793 till the 1st of January 1801, including a period of seven years, have amounted to no more than six hundred and seventy pounds and a few shillings in the aggregate. But although the expenditure during the same period, exclusive of the debt incurred for the purchase of the buildings, &c. and the interest

interest due thereon, did not exceed a thousand and eighty pounds ; above four hundred women have been delivered in the Hospital, and above a thousand and forty have been attended by the physicians and pupils at their own houses. Many of those women were the wives of soldiers and sailors, placed at a distance from all their connections, who must otherwise have been destitute of every care and assistance : and upon repeated occasions, women of this description, actually in labour upon the streets, have been received into the Hospital.

If the sufferings of above fourteen hundred lying-in women have been thus alleviated, at the expence of little more than a thousand pounds, the utility of the institution cannot be doubted—even although the consideration, that the health or lives of a majority of the women and of many of their children were thereby preserved, be put entirely out of the question.

During the same period, eight hundred and forty male, and an hundred and ninety-five female pupils have been instructed at the Hospital.

It is well known that in some cases of childbearing, the assistance of a surgeon or male practitioner of midwifery is absolutely necessary to the preservation of the life of the mother or child. The instruction of eight hundred and forty students, therefore, within seven years in such an art, must be interesting in a high degree to the community at large.

It fortunately happens, however, that in general

no more assistance is necessary during childbearing than what can be given by a regularly instructed midwife. But it would be impossible to teach a midwife her duty on ordinary occasions, and the means by which she may early discover signs or causes of danger in particular cases, so that additional aid may be speedily procured, without affording her the opportunity of attending a Lying-in Hospital. In Scotland there are now many well-informed midwives; but it is believed that before the establishment of a Lying-in Ward in the Royal Infirmary, there was not a single regularly educated midwife in the country. The deplorable consequences of this it is unnecessary to state.

The necessity of a Lying-in Hospital for the purpose of teaching Midwifery cannot be better enforced than in the following Memorial, drawn up at the request of the Senatus Academicus of the University, by the late eminent Principal ROBERTSON, and presented to the Right Honourable the Lord Provost, Magistrates, and Town Council.

“ In consequence of an application from the Pro-
 “ fessor of Midwifery to the Senatus Academicus, they
 “ think it their duty to represent to the Honourable
 “ the Patrons of the University, that the Managers
 “ of the Royal Infirmary had found it necessary to
 “ withdraw the permission which had been given
 “ for some time to the Professors of Midwifery, of
 “ having a Lying-in Ward in that Hospital: That the
 “ practice

“ practice of Midwifery cannot be taught properly
 “ unless the Professor has an hospital into which he
 “ may receive such a number of patients that the
 “ students may have an opportunity of acquiring a
 “ sufficient knowledge both of the delivery and pro-
 “ per treatment of women in childbed : That in
 “ every University where a Professor of Midwifery
 “ is established, provision is made by the public for
 “ such a Lying-in Hospital, as may enable him to in-
 “ struct his students in the practice as well as the
 “ theory of the art. The members of the Senatus
 “ Academicus are fully satisfied, that without a Lying-
 “ in Hospital, this branch of medical education cannot
 “ be conducted as it ought to be ; and that the me-
 “ dical school in this University, which has done so
 “ much credit, and has been of so great emolument
 “ to the country, will be rendered less perfect.

“ From long experience, we have such confidence
 “ in the disposition of our Honourable Patrons to
 “ countenance and promote every measure that may
 “ be beneficial to the University, that we flatter our-
 “ selves they will take this Memorial into conside-
 “ ration, and concert some effectual means of
 “ establishing a Lying-in Hospital, which will en-
 “ able the Professor of Midwifery to instruct his
 “ students with the greatest advantage. Signed in
 “ name, and by appointment of the Senatus Aca-
 “ demicus, WILLIAM ROBERTSON, Principal.

“ *Edinburgh College, December 12. 1791.*”

But

The utility and necessity of a Lying-in Hospital in Edinburgh, are thus, it is presumed, proved by experience and reasoning. But in consequence of the debt originally incurred in the purchase of the buildings, and of the excess in the expenditure above the receipts, the debt was found to amount, on the 1st of January 1801, to above nineteen hundred pounds; and therefore, unless some public aid be afforded, it will be impossible to continue the institution longer than the current year; and hence the property must be sold to discharge the sums due.

It is not proposed, in this Address, to dictate the means by which a fund might be raised fully sufficient to prevent the adoption of this measure. Some idea, however, of the probable expence at which the institution might be continued, may be satisfactory to many benevolent individuals.

A fund of two hundred pounds a-year would defray the expences of about seventy or eighty in-patients, and of two hundred out-patients, allowing to each of the latter the sum of five shillings. This sum is stated upon the supposition that the Professor of Midwifery shall continue, as he has heretofore done, to afford his assistance gratis: and the calculation is founded upon the average expences hitherto incurred.

As the property of the Hospital is probably nearly worth the debt now due, perhaps it might only be necessary to provide for defraying the interest on that debt,

debt, which, at ninety-five pounds, makes the annual sum required nearly three hundred pounds. The average contribution of the students being above sixty pounds, (the whole sum for seven years having amounted to L. 441, 10 s.), there remain two hundred and forty pounds of annual income to be provided.

Signed, by appointment of a General Meeting of
the Contributors,

W^M FETTES,

*Lord Provost of Edinburgh,
President of the Institution.*

Edinburgh, June 6. 1801.

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Craig's Close, Edinburgh. }*

